

Town of Deal
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
State Route 71, 1.5 miles North of Allenhurst
Deal
Monmouth County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1004

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF DEAL

HABS No. NJ-1004

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, State Route 71, 1.5 miles North of Allenhurst, Deal, Monmouth County, New Jersey.

Significance: Deal is representative of the northern New Jersey shore development resulting from the coming of the railroad. During the 1860s, the completion of the Raritan and Delaware railroad lines to New York, and the Long Branch and Seashore lines along the beaches, signaled the opening of the shore to extensive growth. Deal rapidly gained a reputation for excess, and by the 1930s, its architecture was considered avant-garde, as wealthy New York residents hired architects eager to experiment in a variety of revival, craftsman and Japanese-influenced styles.

History: Only a small settlement in 1889, by the 1930s Deal Beach had grown to majestic scale. As Kobbe predicted, the "few cottages" bordering Deal Lake or Loch Arbour multiplied into a resort over the next few years. Interlaken, the land between the forks of Deal Lake, grew from a tract purchased for winter resort development to a self-sufficient community. Though Deal accommodated visitors in "several boarding-houses" as early as 1834, serious growth began in 1894, when the Atlantic Coast Realty Company purchased the Hendrickson family farm lands for development. The land deal, made by Daniel O'Day, an executive for the Standard Oil Company and vice president of the National Transit Company, was considered "the largest real estate transaction" the Jersey coast had ever seen.¹ Around the turn of the century, the Atlantic Coast Company hired nationally known landscape architect Nathan F. Barrett to layout the community. Barrett's plan, with wide streets, extensive lots, a railroad station and a golf course, catered to a wealthy clientele. The resort rapidly gained a reputation for excess, founded on the exploits of its eccentric residents. O'Day set the example by chartering a train to transport 2,000 friends to his house-warming party, with entertainment supplied by the 69th Regiment Band of New York.

The future resort community conspicuously lacked boarding houses and hotels. More representative of the scale and style associated with Deal in the early twentieth century is the Jacob Rothschild mansion, a thirty-seven room, fourteen-bath, white stone building "of French Architecture."² Built by Arthur P. Gottlieb about 1908, the house belonged to William Durant, founder of General Motors Corporation, in the 1920s. By the next decade, Deal architecture was considered avant garde, as wealthy New York residents hired architects eager to experiment in a variety of revival, craftsman and Japanese-influenced styles.³

¹ James Durnell, "Deal Borough Developed by Standard Oil Magnate," Daily Record (June 1, 1971), n.p.

² "Durant Residence at Deal Cost Half-Million. Was Once Home of Rothschild, and was Considered French Masterpiece," Asbury Park Press (February 11, 1940).

³ Erlinda Villamor, "Deal: Where Wealth Wears Many Faces," Asbury Park Press, July 27, 1980.

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The history of the Deal Casino parallels the resort's evolution from a planned community to a wealthy borough. The Georgian-style gambling casino became the Deal Conservatoire of Arts and Theater in 1932, after it was purchased by Dorothy Untermann. In 1935, plays were performed in a theater judged "the swankiest summer theater in the world" by Variety magazine. The home of pianist Leopold Godowski at that time, the Deal school hosted an international crowd of musicians, artists and actors. By 1954, when an illness forced Untermann to sell the Conservatoire, fashions had changed; the city passed up her \$15,000 price for the building, which could have been remodeled into an adequate, historically valuable municipal building.⁴ Instead, the structure was finally purchased by a developer, who razed it and constructed three new homes on the property. A few years later, an \$800,000 Casino with 475 bathhouses was built on Ocean Avenue to satisfy the requirements of modern bathers.⁵

During the Depression, while other Jersey shore resorts sought alternative housing in apartments and duplexes, Deal zoning laws maintained its exclusive neighborhoods. As "estates with tile roofs are rapidly being replaced by modern homes the wealthiest town in America per capita," remains financially secure.⁶ Such building is encouraged by one of the lowest tax rates in Monmouth County. Driving through Deal today is like paging through a glossy real estate magazine; carefully groomed lawns highlight the individual mansions, ranging from late nineteenth-century Colonial Revivals to contemporary "beach" homes. The scale of houses and lawns and the meticulous grooming of personal property, complete with security system and manicured shrubs, sets Deal apart from the average speculative development. A fortress-like seawall, built to protect the property from the sea, also blocks any ocean view. No parking--and tacitly no public--is allowed along this private stretch of Ocean Avenue.

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⁴ E. Burke Maloney, "Conservatoire at Deal Once Well Known Gaming Casino," Asbury Park Press (August 18, 1974).

⁵ "Only Yesterday," Asbury Park Press (March 10, 1974).

⁶ Edward L. Walsh, "Years Change Deal, But its Wealth Remains," Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, NJ: nd, ca. 1989), H1.

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Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatz (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.